THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION AND NORTHERN PHILANTHROPY IN RECONSTRUCTION ALABAMA

By: Loren Schweninger

Schweninger, Loren. "The American Missionary Association and Northern Philanthropy in Reconstruction Alabama," The Alabama Historical Quarterly 33 (Fall and Winter 1970):129-156.

"The results of attempts by . . . the missionary societies to educate the negro in Alabama," wrote Walter Lynwood Fleming at the turn of the century, "were almost wholly bad . . . ."[1] "Northern missionaries were religious fanatics,"[2] he continued, "who cared little about social questions [and] . . . paid no attention to the actual condition of negroes and their station in life." Fleming concluded that philanthropic organizations had a permanent influence for evil in the state of Alabama during Reconstruction.

In the light of evidence now available this negative view of Northern philanthropy in Alabama is untenable. The aid extended by non-sectarian organizations, denominational societies, the Peabody Education Fund and benevolent individuals to Alabama's freedmen, though limited when compared to other Southern states, provided Negroes with necessary schools, clothing, books, and food. The American Missionary Association, aided by the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau, financed secondary and normal schools, relief stations, colleges, and sent hundreds of missionaries and teachers to help build new educational institutions for Alabama Negroes.[3] Furthermore, many Northern missionaries were not religious fanatics, and their efforts in Negro relief, education, religion, economic self- improvement and journalism illustrate their deep concern for the actual condition of freedmen.

Northern philanthropy in Alabama was a small part of the national movement to aid the freedmen in the South during and after the Civil War. With the capture of Port Royal, South

---

[1] 'Walter Lynwood Fleming, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York: 1905), 464-468, 626-627.

[2] 'Henry Lee Swint agrees with Fleming on this point. He writes, "practically all Northern teachers in the South were religious to the point of fanaticism. The American Missionary Association specified that its teachers must be fired with missionary zeal. They must be men of fervent piety." James McPherson quotes Swint, supporting the theme that teachers were fanatics who had formed the backbone of the abolition movement, and "became dauntless leaders of an educational movement which was the natural sequel and supplement of their first crusade." Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville, 1941), 36. James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil* War *and Reconstruction* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964), 392.

[3] 'The titles of "missionary" and "teacher" were used interchangeably in the literature of the period and are synonymous. The *Freedmen's Record* recorded in April, 1865, "By the word teacher is not meant those solely who are expected to teach the ordinary branches of school education. Some never enter a school edifice." *Freedmen's Record*, I (April, 1865), 1.

Carolina, the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New York City, the Educational Society of Boston, and the Port Royal Society of Philadelphia came into being.[4] Grant's victories in the West in 1863 stimulated the birth of the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission in Cincinnati, the Cleveland Aid Commission, and the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission at Chicago.[5] 1864 witnessed the start of the African Civilization Society[6]—officered and managed entirely by colored people.[7] A year later the Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Society sent out missionaries and the New York Ladies' Southern Relief Association packaged clothing, shoes and cloth for distribution in the South. In addition, church groups such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Quakers carried on extensive freedmen's aid.[8] The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) at first distributed supplies to Army camps for relief. Later, under John Morgan Walden, it sent missionary preachers and teachers to assist the recently emancipated slaves.[9] By 1872, this organization employed seventy-five missionaries in the Southern states, and was responsible for over 11,000 pupils.[10] The American Baptist Home Mission Society sent fifty ordained ministers "to labor exclusively for the colored people" during 1866.[11] The Quakers of Philadelphia organized the Friends Association for the "aid and elevation" of Freedmen. By 1867, the executive board boasted of thousands of garments, yards of material, pairs of shoes and stockings that had been sent to [southern cities.][12] The Presbyterian Church at the North likewise established schools, planted academies, seminaries, and churches, in behalf of the "lately enslaved African Race."[13] In all, seventy-nine major aid associations, and innumerable small church and private societies were organized before the Confederate collapse. Though diverse in

---

[4] *The American Freedmen,* I (June, 1866), 37.
[5] *Ibid.,* 38.
[6] John W. Alvord, *Seventh Semi-Annual Report on Schools and Finances for Freedmen,* January 1, 1869, 54.
[7] *'Ibid.,* 55.
[8] *'Senate Executive Documents,* 39 Cong., 2 sess., no. 6, 11. Report of Wager Swayne, Assistant Commissioner of Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands for Alabama, October 31, 1866. A union of many aid societies occurred in May, 1865. "To secure greater harmony of action among the friends of the colored man," the *Freedmen's Record* read, "to give unity and added effectiveness to the movement now on foot in his behalf, and to insure a more judicious and economical expenditure of the means employed for his benefit, the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, and the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association, and the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored people constitute themselves a general Association—The American Freedmen's Aid Union." *Freedmen's Record, I, May,* 1865, 79. A year later further amalgamation took place when the American Freedmen,s Aid Commission incorporated the Chicago, Cleveland and Cincinnati aid societies and became the American Freedmen,s Union Commission. The secular philosophy of the AFUC caused disharmony among its members, and a short time later many societies broke away from the AFUC and pursued their own path of providing help to Southern Negroes. Alvord, *Fifth Semi- Annual Report . .. , Jan.* 1, 1868, 48.
[9] 'Miscellaneous Notes, John Morgan Walden Manuscripts [no date listed], University of Chicago.
[10] *American Missionary,* XVI (October, 1872), 231. Even across the Atlantic committees were formed "to assist the people of the United States with the difficulty of caring for the recently emancipated slaves." In London, for example, the Duke of Argyll inaugurated the National Freedmen's Aid Union of Great Britain and Ireland by a speech at the Westminster Palace Hotel, May 17, 1865. In that same year societies originated in Paris, Geneva, Zurich, Dublin, and Berne. Though diverse in motives, aims, and location, all aid societies shared one tenet—to assist Southern Negroes in their new found freedom. *Report of the National Freedmen's Aid Societies of Great Britain, I* (London, 1865), passim. *The American Freedmen,* I (June, 1866), 41-47.
[11] *"Ibid.,* 233.
[12] *'Report of the Executive Board of the Friends' Association of Philadelphia and its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen,* IV (Philadelphia, 1867), 11. "
[13] A brief, factual description of the seventy-nine most important freedmen,s aid societies can be found in: Julius Parmelee, "Freedmen's Aid Societies, 18611871," U. S. Dept. of Interior *Bulletin,* 1916, 268-294.

origins and location, their common resolve was to provide help for the homeless, hungry, and illiterate freedmen of the South.

In Alabama the need to aid Negroes was as great as in any other area of the South. Thomas Conway, a Union officer, in a letter to the president of the National Freedmen's Relief Association wrote, "The advance of the Army from Mobile upward [in the spring of 1865] was the occasion for the flight of nearly all the colored people from their homes. The roads are filled with thousands upon thousands. Their suffering weakens me . . . Many have starved to death . . . I see freedmen every day who come scared and bleeding from the brutal treatment of their oppressors. There was never presented to any people so vast a field for the exercise of benevolence. Clothing and learning must come from . . . the benevolent hearts of merciful loyal people."[14]

A year before Conway posted his letter the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission had appointed "intelligent and responsible agents" to distribute "goods" in Alabama.[15] The agents canvassed army camps to ascertain the most needy areas and furnished them with books, clothes, and rations. This organization also sent missionaries to Talladega and Montgomery, Alabama, in 1865. Soon after, other societies sent representatives and material to aid blacks in Alabama. The Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Commission established five schools in the towns of Huntsville, Stevenson, Tuscumbia, Athens, and Selma,[16] and the Cleveland Aid Commission sent missionaries and materials to the state in 1865. Major General Wager Swayne, head of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama, reported that the Cleveland Commission sent four teachers to the state in April, 1866. Six months later this active organization supported seven teachers and a matron in Montgomery and three teachers in Talladega, "Besides the pay and maintenance of these," Swayne wrote, "the commission has made quite liberal contributions of clothing and distributions to the destitute."[17] The only other major nondenominational society to dispatch supplies and missionaries to Alabama was the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commisson.[18] This society contributed "ten packages of clothing" to Negroes at Huntsville, and secured a hospital for school purposes in Mobile.[19]

Numerous local organizations and benevolent individuals in the North also sent aid to Alabama Negroes. The Freedmen's Aid Society of Tallmadge, Ohio, contributed books, stationery, slates and money to various schools in Alabama.[20] C. P. Wheeler, a teacher in Eufaula, acknowledged, "The Readers came just in time and will be of great service. Many thanks to the Tallmadge Aid Society for your generous donation."[21] The Ladies Benevolent Society of Burton, Ohio, sent

---

[14] Letter from Thomas Conway, General Superintendent of Freedmen in Alabama, to F. G. Shaw, President of the National Freedmen's Relief Association, quoted in New York *Times,* June 6, 1865.
[15] Western Freedmen's Aid Commission, *Appeal in Behalf of the National Freedmen* (Cincinnati, 1864) , 10.
[16] *'Senate Executive Documents,* 39 Cong., 2 sess., no. 6, 11.
[17] *"Ibid., 12.*
[18] *'Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission, II* (Chicago, 1865) , 10, 11.
[19] *'Senate Executive Documents,* 39 Cong., 2 sess., no. 6, 12-13.
[20] "Letter from Albert A. Safford to Erastus Milo Cravath, Secretary of the American Missionary Association, Talladega, Alabama, June 15, 1872, American Missionary Association Manuscripts, hereafter referred to as AMA MSS.
[21] "Charles P. Wheeler to Edward P. Smith, Secretary, A.M.A., Eufaula, Alabama, October 31, 1868, AMA MSS.

articles of clothing, boxes of books, and "other necessities," to Josephine Pierce at Talladega.[22] Mr. William P. Daniels of Worcester, Massachusetts, gave twenty-five dollars for the teachers home at Athens.[23] Mr. S. Parker of Bentwater, Michigan, donated one hundred dollars to a missioneary school in Talladega,[24] and some people in Vermont presented $112 to a school for colored children in Union Springs, Alabama.[25]

Though church groups, aid societies and benevolent individuals combined their efforts to assist Alabama freedmen, the amount of their help was small. Perhaps because of geographic isolation, or the fact that most of the Civil War battles were fought in Virginia, the freedmen in Alabama received less attention than other Southern states, until the American Missionary Association entered the field in 1867. Freedmen's Aid Socieites based in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Chicago sent clothes, rations, books and a few missionaries to the state, smaller organizations contributed slates and stationary, and charitable individuals afforded $25 or even $100 grants to freedmen in 1865 and 1866. But this was not great when compared to the assistance rendered other Southern states by Northern philanthropy during the same period. For instance, benevolent societies had founded eight schools in Alabama by late 1866. In the same period philanthropic organizations supported fifteen times as many schools in Virginia and North Carolina, and ten times as many in South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Maryland and Tennessee.[26] After eighteen months of peace, Northern aid associations had commissioned thirty-one teachers to Alabama, compared to the two hundred commissioned to Virginia and the 148 to South Carolina.[27]

[26]John Alvord's report in 1866 includes the following table:

	No. of Schools (for freedmen)	Teachers (for freedmen)
Virginia	123	200
North Carolina	119	135
South Carolina	75	148
Georgia	79	113
Florida	38	51
Mississippi	50	80
Louisiana	73	90
Texas	90	43
Arkansas	30	28
Maryland	86	101
Tennessee	74	132
ALABAMA	8	31

The report noted that Alabama in some cases reported school systems rather than individual schools. The total number of schools and teachers still remained far below other Southern states. Alvord, *Second Semi-Annual Report*, July 1, 1866, 2.

[27]*Mobile Advertiser and Register*, August 25, 1866.

Miss Ellen L. Benton, who taught at Hampton and Fortress Monroe, Virginia, from 1863 to 1867, and then moved to Tuscaloosa, protested, "I have been teaching in this place for three

[22] 'Josephine Pierce to Erastus M. Cravath, Talladega, Ala., September 30, 1871. *American Missionary*, XVI (October, 1872) , 229.
[23] 'Carrie M. Blood to Erastus Cravath, Athens, Alabama, March 27, 1871, AMA MSS.
[24] 'Josephine Pierce to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, June 29, 1872, AMA MSS.
[25] 'William P. M. Gilbert to G. Pike, Tuskegee, Alabama, November 29, 1869, AMA MSS.
[26] John Alvord's report in 1866 includes the above table:
[27] Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 25, 1866.

months. I cannot say I like it as well as Virginia . . . We have nothing to assist us to interest the children or to attract them to the school, and we feel a need of some of those things that are sent to the schools in Virginia.[28] Another missionary lamented, "The Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission have relinquished the field [here] having never in fact more than nominally occupied it." R. D. Harper, Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama, as late as 1868, pleaded, "We are almost daily in receipt of most urgent appeals [for missionaries and supplies] . . .. Cannot something additional be done.[29]

The disparity of aid received by Negroes in Alabama as compared to other Southern states is further illustrated by the activities of the Peabody Education Fund. Endowed with one million dollars from George Peabody in 1867, the Fund sent money to individual school districts in the South until well into the twentieth century. Notwithstanding an exuberant editorial in the Mobile Register that proclaimed George Peabody "benefactor of the Southern people," and the initial optimism of Barnas Sears, the general agent of the Fund in the South, little help was forthcoming to Alabama.[30] The state received only a few thousand dollars a year between 1868 and 1872. In 1873, Alabama school districts accepted a total of $7,000 for public education in five locations, while $32,000 was distributed to fifty-eight cities and towns in Virginia.[31] In 1874, the Peabody Fund granted Alabama one fourth of the amount given to Virginia.[32] The next year, of the nearly one hundred thousand dollars expended by this Northern based organization, the states with the third largest number of Negroes in the United States got about three thousand dollars.[33] Every Southern state, with the exception of Florida, obtained more monetary aid from the Fund than Alabama.

Sears justified this maldistribution in a letter to the Alabama Superintendent of Schools. He scolded, "if the people do little we do little. If they do nothing, we do nothing. Several states are doing nobly now . . . I cannot specify any amount of Alabama."[34] Later he added, "the apathy of the people [of the state] seems to be quite as great as their poverty. For these reasons our contributions for Alabama are at present very limited."[35] The policy of the Fund, promulgated and supported by Sears, re-requiring schools "well regulated," continued for ten months of the year, and having regular attendance of not less than 85%, discriminated against states where poverty was greatest. Alabama, in urgent need of assistance, ironically received less than its neighbors.[36]

Not only was the amount donated to public education in Alabama small, but aid to white schools exceeded that giver to Negro schools. The official policy of the Fund, announced in February,

---

[28] "Ellen Benton to Edward Smith, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, July 29, 1867, AMA MSS.
[29] "R. D. Harper to George Whipple, Secretary, A.M.A., Montgomery, April 1, 1868, AMA MSS.
[30] "Mobile *Register,* Feb. 19, 1867. Sears explained to the Board of Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund in 1868, "Two considerations make it necessary to be somewhat liberal in our allowances for Alabama and Mississippi. One is they are far behind other states in interest in education, and require powerful stimulants; and they have not a great number of large towns, where alone [the Fund can be effective."] *Proceedings of the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund, I* (Boston, 1875), 108.
[31] *'Ibid.,* 317.
[32] *32 Ibid.,* 368.
[33] *"Ibid., II, 16-18.*
[34] *"Ibid.,* II, 68.
[35] *"Ibid.,* II, 169-170.
[36] *"American Missionary,* XVI (August, 1872), 184.

1871, called for payment to white schools enrolling not less than 100 pupils, $300; 200 pupils, $450; and two thirds of that rate for colored schools.[37] In general, because of inadequate appropriations and discrimination, the Peabody Education Fund accomplished little for Negro public schools in Alabama.[38]

The two most significant sources of Northern assistance to Alabama's freedmen were the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association. The bill that passed both branches of Congress over President Andrew Johnson's veto, July 16, 1866, empowered the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama "to seize, hold, lease, or sell all buildings . . . as were formerly owned by or claimed and not heretofore disposed of by the United States government." The buildings were to be used for educational purposes, "whenever benevolent associations shall, without cost to the Government, provide suitable teachers and means of instruction.[39] It also instructed Bureau agents to cooperate at all times with private benevolent associations and teachers "duly accredited and appointed by them!'[40] In short, as Bureau Assistant Commissioner Clinton B. Fisk stated, "benevolent and religious organizations will be afforded the utmost facilities in the establishment and maintenance of good schools.[41]

In Montgomery the Bureau appropriated $10,000 for a school building just south of the Capitol in 1868. The colored people purchased the property, while George Stanley Pope, an American Missionary Association representative, supervised construction of the new school house, and became its first principal.[42] General Swayne entrusted to one philanthropic organization four thousand dollars toward a school in Selma, and two thousand for a school house in Marion.[43] In Tuscaloosa, the Bureau paid rent on a "one room frame structure" for a missionary teacher.[44] Charles W. Buckley, the Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama, reported to the American Missionary Association "six thousand dollars deposited at Montgomery for purchase of the Talladega College, and the appropriation of twice that sum to Mobile for school purposes."[45] On Sunday, April 11, 1869, missionary Thomas C. Steward dedicated a school building in Marion. It was built at a cost of about four thousand, two hundred dollars. The Bureau provided twenty-eight hundred dollars, while the colored people of Marion and the A.M.A. contributed the remainder.[46]

In addition to providing buildings and paying rent for Negro schools the Bureau also paid teachers' salaries. Though the law forbade direct subsidy in this manner, Mr. Buckley in a note of appreciation to the A.M.A. stated : "I am sincerely thankful for all your association are [sic]

---

[37] *Ibid., 183.*
[38] *Proceedings of the Trustees of the Peabody Education Fund,* I, 209, 256-258, 310-314, 377.
[39] *The American Freedmen, I* (August, 1866), *77.*
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *"House Executive Documents,* 39 Cong., 1 sess., no. 69, p. 49. Letter from Clinton B. Fisk, Assistant Commissioner of BRFAL to War Dept., July 24, 1865.
[42] *"American Missionary, XII* (Sept., 1868), 200.
[43] "John Silsby to Erastus Cravath, Selma, Alabama, Feb. 26, 1867, AMA MSS.
[44] "Ellen L. Benton to Edward P. Smith, Sect. of A.M.A., Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Oct. 18, 1867, AMA MSS.
[45] *"Twenty-First Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1867), 59. Charles Buckley, Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama to Erastus M. Cravath, Montgomery, Alabama, July 26, 1867, AMA MSS.
[46] *"American Missionary, XIII* (Aug., 1869), 172.

doing for us . . . The bureau will see that they [the teachers] are paid and have good care."[47] An examination of the expenditures of the Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama illuminates the extent of Federal help. The Bureau spent $156,941.10 for educational purposes in the state between 1865 and 1870. Of this amount $116,297.62 went for rent, repairs and construction of school buildings, $34,846.56 for salaries of teachers, $1,307.48 for transportation of teachers, $4,411.26 for salaries of superintendents and additional amounts for school books and furniture.[48]

The American Missionary Association, unlike the Peabody Education Fund, centered its attention on the education, relief, and uplift of Alabama freedmen. Dating back to the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, the Association began as a committee formed to secure the release of forty-two slaves who had risen against their Spanish captors on the slave schooner "Amistad."[49] A generation later the organization became the most important society engaged in missionary and educational work among freedmen in Alabama. The number of teachers sent to the state by the A.M.A. far exceeded the total of all other organizations. Similarly, the expenditures of the society in the state surpassed one million dollars, including missionaries', superintendents', and teachers' salaries, traveling expenses, books, lands, school houses, furniture, and physical relief to the sick and destitute.[50] In 1867, the Annual Report of the Association read : "Alabama has received less assistance from the American Missionary Association than its importance deserves. It is hoped that for the coming year the Association will have the funds to enlarge greatly the work in Alabama.[51] In 1867, thirty-nine A.M.A. missionaries accepted commissions, and journeyed to Valhermosa Springs, Talladega, Selma, Girard, Athens, Demopolis, Marion, Mobile, and Montgomery, Alabama.[52]

Similar to representatives of other Northern organizations, A.M.A. teachers endeavored to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and cloth the destitute. Simultaneous with the commissioning of large numbers of teachers to Alabama, an official described conditions as "truly alarming . . . . Destitution is rapidly on the increase throughout the state. The supply furnished by the government, though apparently large, is wholly inadequate to meet the pressing wants of the destitute. In some localities persons are reported to have actually perished from want of food."[53] A Northern newspaper account in 1867, titled "What has been done for the destitute people of the South?" depicted want in Alabama as "greater than any of the other states."[54] The United States government declared thirty thousand Alabama Negroes destitute in that year. Association teachers provided some help, though little could be done on a large scale because of inadequate funds. John Silsby, whose remarkable career in the state covered a decade, provided rations for the needy in Selma. John Kimball established an "eating house" for destitute Negroes, and

---

[47] *"Elizabeth Bethel, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama," Journal of Southern History, XIV (Feb., 1948), 69. Charles Buckley to Edward Smith, Montgomery, Alabama, April 26, 1867. Ibid., May 17, 1867, AMA MSS.*
[48] "Bethel, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Alabama," 89.
[49] "A.M.A., *Annual Report, XXI,* 11; XXII, 30.
[50] *American Missionary,* XVIII (January, 1874), 12; *A.M.A. Annual Report,* XXII, 8.
[51] "A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXI, 51.
[52] "For yearly commissions of A.M.A. see *American Missionary, XIII* (May, 1869), 102-103; XIV (June, 1870), 124-125; XV (May, 1871), 98-99; XVI (May, 1872), 98-99; XVII (Sept. 1873), 196-197; XIX (Feb. 1875), 32.
[53] "Official reports and newspaper accounts vary as to the exact number of destitute in Alabama between 1865-1870. See *House Executive Documents,* 40 Cong., 2 sess., no. 1, 650-680, Report of the Commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands. Baltimore *American and Commercial Advertiser,* October 2, 1866; May 2, 1866; Ma-: 7, 1867. New York *Times,* Feb. *7,* 1866.
[54] "Baltimore *American and Commercial Advertiser,* May 7, 1867.

William Richardson distributed corn to needy families in Mobile.[55] J. Curry acknowledged "a cheque" for $100.00 from the New York Southern Relief Association and applied it to "necessitous black families that are painfully destitute."[56] Moreover, A.M.A. teachers cared for the sick.[57] Besides the major epidemics of small pox, cholera, and yellow fever that swept the state periodically, inadequate diet and unsanitary conditions caused sickness among freedmen[58] By November, 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau had established eight hospitals in the state. Missionaries worked in the "Bureau hospitals" as nurses, doctors' aides and administrators. Miss Eliza J. Ethridge of Dover, Illinois, and Miss Harriet Wiswell of Chicago cared for black patients at Riverside, five miles north of Mobile.[59] Others found employment in hospitals throughout the state.[60] Again, the number treated was small compared to the total number of Negroes that needed medical attention.

Along with caring for the starving and ill, A.M.A. teachers distributed clothing to the "imperfectly clad.'[61] John Coburn, Chairman of a House Committee investigating "Affairs in Alabama," reported "the appearance of the colored people in the state of Alabama is a silent and powerful witness to their poverty."[62] and a teacher despaired that many scholars left school because they were "pitifully destitute of clothing."[63]

Barrels and boxes of clothes were sent from the North to Association teachers in Alabama and distributed among the Freedmen. Miss Mary E. Smith of Emerson Institute in Mobile, dispensed "one barrel of clothing from the Benevolent Society of the First Congregational Church of Southwest Boyston, Massachusetts" to Negroes in the Mobile area.[64] Miss Josephine Pierce, a missionary at Talladega, doled out a box of bedding valued at $125 from the Presbyterian Church of Canfield, Ohio. and a box of clothing from the Congregational Church of Tallmadge, Ohio, to Freedmen around Talladega.[65] In a like manner Mrs. Emeline M. W. Bassett, a teacher at Eufaula, Alabama, distributed a barrel of clothes among the poverty stricken. In a letter to Erastus M. Cravath, Secretary of the American Missionary Association, she described in vivid detail the conditions of poverty among the Freedmen, and her effort to alleviate suffering :

The good peo. of Middletown sent me a bbl. of clothing, some interesting cases came up in giving them out—but I suppose they are much the same as are constantly reported to you : one I think however was a little the saddest I have yet seen : We had very cold weather last week—the coldest this winter I think—one morning it was so severe that the thought of some warm little garments still left in the bbl. troubled one. For I knew there were plenty of little folks that needed them, so I wrapped myself up and started out with a big bundle in my arms to find them. I went to one poor old hut that I know—a few loose boards nailed together— a mud chimney at one end and the bare ground,

---

[55] "John Kimbell to Edward P. Smith, Mobile, Alabama, Feb. 12, 1870, AMA MSS.
[56] "Letter from J.S.M. Curry to New York Relief Association, Marion, Alabama, April 18, 1867, printed in Anna M. Holmes, *New York Ladies Southern Relief Association, 1866-1867* (New York, 1926), 46.
[57] "O. Gates to John Ogden, Benton, Alabama, Dec. 4, 1867, AMA MSS.
[58] "Mobile *Register*, March 1, 1866; *Senate Executive Documents*, 39 Cong., 1 sess., no. 27, Report of Assistant Commissioners of BRFAL (Wager Swayne, January 31, 1866); Baltimore *American*, March 22, 1866.
[59] *"American Missionary*, XI (Nov. 1867), 255.
[60] "A.M.A., *Annual Report*, XXII, 74-75.
[61] *"The Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission,* II (Chicago, 1865), 5; *American Missionary, XIX* (March, 1875), 57.
[62] *"House Report*, 43 Cong., 2 sess., no. 262. "Affairs *in* Alabama," 1865, 94.
[63] *"American Missionary, XVIII* (February, 1874), 36.
[64] '"Mary E. Smith to John Strieby, Secretary, A.M.A., Mobile, Alabama, April 8, 1869, AMA MSS.
[65] 'Josephine Pierce to G. Pike, Talladega, Alabama, Feb. 24, 1871, AMA MSS.

usually muddy for a floor is the whole of it . . . I saw a sick woman lying upon a broken iron bedstead covered with very dirty rags. There was nothing else in the room except an old barrel with a board across it on which were two or three broken dishes, and an old chair . . . two or three little chips were smoking in the broken down fire place which a sad sickly looking little five year old boy had put there to keep his mother warm while he stood out of doors on the sunny side of the house to get the heat of the sun. The woman had consumption and had been [down] nearly a year. I left clothing and blankets for the mother and boy.[66]

Mrs. Bassett's dramatic description of poverty near Eufaula, and her distribution of clothing, typifies the relief effort of A.M.A. teachers. This charity was not on a massive scale. Indeed, neither the state government nor the Freedmen's Bureau inaugurated large scale relief measures. If Mrs. Bassett and her co-workers failed to cure poverty in Alabama, they did alleviate the suffering of many freedmen.

Though disease and destitution existed among blacks in Alabama during the period, an over-emphasis of the "wretchedness" of Negroes is misleading.[67] The great number of Freedmen found employment soon after the end of hostilities and a few raised themselves to positions of wealth. One Montgomery planter stated "negroes never worked better than they are now doing."[68] Governor Patton, in his message to the legislature in January 1866, commented, "everywhere the freedmen seem to be entering into contracts for the present year and cheerfully and faithfully entering upon the discharge of the obligations contracted."[69] A month later a special correspondent for the Nation summarized his visit to Mobile: "The freedmen in this part of Alabama have almost all found work for the year, and already enter upon the performance of it. In the immediate neighborhood of Mobile the turpentine business forms the chief employment of the people ; and for working in the orchards the men receive some ten, some fifteen, some even twenty-five dollars a month."[70] A newspaper article in the same city reported one Freedman worth $30,000 in specie, and several others worth from $10,000 to $25,000. The article continued, "and we have further knowledge that on Friday last, four Freedmen purchased the valuable property on the corner of Royal and St. Anthony Streets for the sum of $35,000, and received a deed for it. Two others recently purchased real estate to the amount of $6,000, and the deed is on record."[71]

Though Northern missionaries were concerned with feeding the destitute, caring for the sick, and clothing the poor, their foremost purpose was "to banish ignorance from the land." Prior to 1868, the responsibility for educating the recently emancipated slaves in Alabama was largely in the hands of American Missionary Association teachers. Neither the provisional government, nor the state legislature of 1865-67, provided state funds for the support of Negro education.[72] Even with the advent of Congressional Reconstruction public assistance was small. "In the present impoverished condition of Alabama," wrote Edwin Beecher, State Superintendent of Education in 1869, "without any funds in the public treasury for the establishment of schools, but little can be done during the present year toward the establishment of public free schools throughout the

---

[66] "Emeline M. W. Bassett to Erastus M. Cravath, Eufaula, Alabama, Feb. 7, 1872, AMA MSS.
[67] "Fleming, 309, 312; Hilary Herbert, *Why The Solid South?* (Baltimore, 1890), 29.
[68] *"Senate Executive Documents,* 39 Cong., 1 sess., vol. 2, no. 27, 65.
[69] "Mobile *Register,* Jan. 18, 1866.
[70] *"The Nation, II* (New York, 1865), 209.
[71] 'Mobile *Register,* Feb. 18, 1866.
[72] "'Horace Mann Bond, *Social and Economic Influences on the Public Education of Negroes in Alabama, 1865-1930* (Washington, 1937), 73-86.

state."[73] Though the Radical Reconstruction legislature provided for a state board of education and a school fund administered by a superintendent of education, financial difficulties hampered their effectiveness.[74] For instance, many schools closed because of a lack of money in 1872, and as the nation slumped into a severe depression in 1873, the Alabama Board of Education closed all the public schools, except for a few in the large cities and towns "on account of the depleted condition of the state treasury."[75] Thus, to a large extent, Negro education in Alabama during the period 1865-1875 was directed by Northerners—more specifically, the teachers of the American Missionary Association.

A.M.A. missionaries organized primary, secondary, and normal schools, recruited Negro teachers, introduced academic curricula, purchased land and buildings for new schools, and in many localities brought Negro schools to a par with white schools.

William T. Richardson, A.M.A. Superintendent of Schools in Montgomery, bought the Trade House building in 1867. He gathered together five hundred scholars into a primary day school and two hundred adults into a night school.[76] Negroes learned to read and write, and soon attained "a proficiency" that was "truly cheering."[77] At the same time, George S. Pope opened Swayne School in the state capital. A white gentleman remarked to a reporter from the Montgomery Advertiser that he was astonished at the proficiency of colored pupils at Swayne School.[78] The next year Pope started normal classes, and on September 5, 1870, fifteen colored teachers left by train to teach in nearby communities.[79] Ironically, they boarded the railway cars of the Montgomery and Mobile in sight of the Confederate Capitol, where Jefferson Davis took his oath, where the first Congress of the Confederate States of America met and sent their message to "open on Sumter," and next to a brick wall still bearing the sign "Negro Brokers.[80] In 1868, one observer described Negro schools in Montgomery "on a par" with white schools, shortly after the American Missionary Association began its work there.[81] And a reporter for the Chicago Tribune remarked after witnessing "examinations" at Swayne School, "I have never seen scholars who have been in school for the same length of time do better. I am especially pleased with the recitations in grammar."[82]

In Selma, Marion, and Athens, Northern teachers reported similar progress. Thomas C. Steward mailed sketches of Marion's Lincoln Academy for Freedmen to the New York office of the A.M.A. In his first letter to the home office Steward referred to himself as a pioneer teacher, and described "pupils unused to books and school." In a later correspondence he said, "three years ago the pioneer teacher in this place was constantly reminded of many difficulties . . . . Now the teachers in Lincoln Academy, with its pleasant well arranged rooms and well graded school, find

---

[73] Alvord, *Report,* Jan. 1, 1869, 27.
[74] *"Ibid.,* Jan. 1, 1867, 16.
[75] *'Proceedings of Peabody Trustees,* I, 422.
[76] "A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXI, 49.
[77] *"Ibid.,* 50.
[78] *"American Missionary, XVIII* (Sept., 1874), *199.*
[79] *"Ibid.,* XIV (Sept., 1870), 22.
[80] *"Ibid.,* 199-200.
[81] 'George L. Putnam to Edward P. Smith, Montgomery, Alabama, Nov. 21, 1868, AMA MSS.
[82] *'American Missionary, XIX (Oct.,* 1875), 225.

their duties essentially such as they would in any union school at the North."[83] At Selma a day school for colored children opened May 1, 1867.[84] For the first month it averaged only 15 pupils ; the second month, 30; and the third, 50. In Athens, four lady teachers from Michigan taught four grades. The curriculum included first through fifth Readers, geography, grammar, arithmetic, Latin, and "higher branches." Miss Mary F. Wells, of Ann Arbor, described her colleagues and students in glowing terms. "Supported by the American Missionary Association the ladies are doing great good," she wrote, "not only in the school but among the free people outside the school. We have [started] a large school also at night in which all the teachers are engaged for the parents of our day school scholars." I came here in 1865 [and since that time] there has been steady enthusiasm[,] . . . progress [,] and zeal."[85]

A week after the Civil War ended the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Society, later a branch of the A.M.A., opened a graded primary school for Freedmen in Mobile. Within four months courses included reading, arithmetic, advanced English, and geography. An article in the American Freedman, the official organ of the American Freedmen's Union Commission, praised the school for "excellent discipline," "rigid examinations," and "truly surprising progress by the majority of scholars."[86] A year later, John Morgan Walden, Secretary of the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission, reported "the Mobile primary schools are among the most successful under the commission."[87] On January 7, 1868, the American Missionary Association with a large donation from Ralph Emerson of Rockford, Illinois, purchased a brick building four stories high, surrounded by four acres of garden, and fronting "on the most aristocratic street in the city.[88] Supplied with modern furniture, it was equipped with a complete set of chemical apparatus, and rooms to accommodate eight hundred scholars. The editor of the Mobile Advance deemed, "the system of education now afforded the colored children of Mobile [not] inferior to the best advantages within reach of whites.[89] In March, 1868, George Putnam became the first principal of Emerson School, named after its benefactor, and soon instituted college and normal courses.[90] Late in 1869, thirty colored teachers graduated with teaching certificates and began to establish schools for Freedmen in the community.[91] Within half a decade, teachers from "Blue College" — the name students gave to Emerson—had taught over 3,000 black scholars.[92] Moreover, the educational activities of the A.M.A. in Mobile, as elsewhere in Alabama, stimulated a free public school system for freedmen. Horace Mann Bond, the leading historian of Negro education in Alabama, writes, "What the Mobile board would have done for the education of Negroes

---

[83] *Ibid.,* XIV, 200.
[84] Alvord, *Report, Jan.* 1, 1868, 32.
[85] "Mary F. Wells to Edward P. Smith, Athens, Alabama, Feb. 18, 1867, AMA MSS.
[86] *"American Freedmen,* I (Sept., 1866), *99.*
[87] *Ibid.,* I (May, 1866), 27.
[88] *"American Missionary, XII* (March, 1868), 61. Jacob Shipherd, an officer in the A.M.A. was sent to Mobile to purchase land and a school. He wrote, "Our transaction was consummated yesterday to the great satisfaction of all parties.... The Deeds will be sent to you as soon as recorded. . . . This property cost over $50,000 and its possession gives us unexampled prestige in the whole valley." Jacob Shipherd to Mr. Whitney, Mobile, Jan. 7, 1868, AMA MSS. A day later George Putnam sent a telegram to Edward P. Smith, "The college is ours, we have possession." Telegram, George Putnam to E. Smith, Mobile, Jan. 8, 1868, AMA MSS.
[89] *Ibid.,* XII (March, 1868), 62.
[90] "George L. Putnam to Edward P. Smith, Mobile, Alabama, Jan. 18, 1869; George L. Putnam to the Secretaries of the A.M.A., Mobile, May 6, 1869, AMA MSS.
[91] "George Putnam to [J.] Strieby, Mobile, Alabama, October 10, 1869, AMA MSS.
[92] *American Missionary, XIX* (Oct., 1875), 225.

"without the presence of the American Missionary Association must remain a matter of speculation. With the Association present as a competing and stimulating agent, the Board was led successively toward the development of a system of free schools for Negroes."[93]

At Talladega, where the Cleveland Freedmen's Aid Commission had maintained an "excellent school" since 1865, the A.M.A. founded the first college institution for Negroes in Alabama in 1867.[94] The "generous liberality" of Reverend L. Foster, of Blue Island, Illinois, supplied "in a large measure" the funds for the erection of a brick building sixty by one hundred feet and three stories high.[95] It was furnished with recitation rooms, classrooms, a chapel, and living quarters for fifty pupils.[96] The Twenty-Second Annual Report of the A.M.A. termed Talladega College "one of our best schools."[97] In 1868, Henry E. Brown, a Nebraskan and first principal of Talladega, organized a normal department and a recruitment program for Negro teachers.[98] He visited the nine adjacent counties seeking teachers, and told community leaders, "pick out the best specimen of a young man you have for a teacher, and bring to church with you next Sunday all the corn and bacon you can spare for his living, and I will take him to my school and make a teacher of him."[99] Not only did Brown muster promising students to become teachers, but on one occasion he took a tent "Just received from New York," four of his class, and went "among the mountains to help the people build a house for day school and church purposes."[100] "So day after day the men worked," he wrote from Kingston, "making shingles and hewing timber, .. . and now the school house chapel, 26 x 38 feet, is nearly done, and already one of my helpers has gone to another field called the 'Cove' to help get shingles for another building.'[101] In 1869, largely due to Brown's initiative, two hundred students attended Talladega College and the normal class counted nearly fifty.[102] In addition, colored teachers, trained at Talladega, established schools in remote areas. One wrote, "I went to Clay county. There was no preparation for a school and no school house. The white people were not willing to let the colored people have time to build. I found a colored person's house, and went in and began school with prayer. One Saturday we cut logs for a [school] house . . . . So we totes the logs and built a school."[103]

Mr. Brown instituted an academic curriculum and a rigorous "set" of examinations. He initiated classes in Latin and Greek, geography, and grammar, arithmetic and "analysis.'[104] One visitor remarked, after having witnessed the year end examinations, "the scholars show a really surprising power of analysis.'[105] A Talladega newspaper praised the Negro college for being one of the most successful of the many institutions of learning established in the South by Northern

---

[93] "Bond, *Public Education for Negroes . . . ,* 84.
[94] Alvord, *Report,* July 1, 1868, 64.
[95] *"American Missionary,* XIII (March, 1869), 61.
[96] *"Ibid.,* (Oct., 1869), 224.
[97] A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXII, 65.
[98] "The nine adjacent counties, thickly populated with blacks, had no schools for freedmen. *Ibid.*
[99] *"Ibid.,* 65.
[100] A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXVII, 27; *American Missionary,* XVII (Nov., 1873), 2 5 6.
[101] "A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXVII, 29.
[102] "Henry E. Brown, to Edward Smith, Talladega, Alabama, Jan. 14, 1869, AMA MSS.
[103] *"American Missionary,* XIV (Aug., 1870), 175-176.
[104] *"Ibid.,* XVI (Aug., 1872), 178; (Sept., 1872), 199.
[105] "Henry E. Brown to Dr. Taylor, Sect. of the American Bible Society, Talladega, Alabama, Feb. 18, 1869, AMA MSS.

philanthropists.[106] Ex-Governor Parsons, who visited Talladega, remarked that he was impressed with the capacities of the Freedmen and the "thoroughness" and "efficiency" of the instructors.[107] Similarly, Judge McAfee, who had resided in Talladega since 1833 and had served "as a trustee with the principle schools" in the antebellum period said, "I will content myself by saying that no institutions of learning [in Talladega] since that time [1833] to the present, equals this College, and that the worthy President and associate teachers are emintly [sic] qualified for their delicate ... and responsible trusts."[108]

The educational work of A.M.A. missionaries among Alabama Negroes was impressive. Though they failed to "banish ignorance from the land," Northern teachers built schools, organized college and normal departments, obtained help from the Freedmen's Bureau, stimulated black enthusiasm for Negro education, and introduced academic courses and "rigid examinations." Schools were erected in over thirty locations under the direct supervision of Association representatives. College institutions for blacks opened their doors at Talladega, Montgomery, and Mobile and trained, Negro teachers planted schools in Black Belt counties where previously no educational opportunities existed for ex-slaves and their children. The curriculum of study in A.M.A. schools included a wide variety of courses, ranging from fundamentals in reading and writing to Latin and Greek. And far sighted Northern reformers in Alabama engendered a spirit of enthusiasm among freedmen for their own educational elevation. By 1871, the quality of colored schools in Mobile equalled that of white schools. Talladega Normal School was rated one of the best in the South by white citizens, and Swayne School in Montgomery enrolled nearly six hundred Negro scholars."[109]

Though relief and education of Freedmen in Alabama were of primary concern to A.M.A. teachers, they also became involved in numerous other activities to aid blacks. Northern missionaries started churches and temperance societies, invested association funds, advanced various economic schemes, solicited the cooperation of white businessmen, and one became the first editor of the Nationalist, a Negro newspaper in Mobile. With rare exceptions, notably Thomas C. Steward, who was a state Senator, and John Silsby, a member of the 1867 constitutional convention, missionaries in Alabama did not take an active part in political affairs. Though Republican in sympathy, they believed the educational interests of the freedmen could best be served by staying out of polities. For instance, Albert A. Safford complained of a politically minded teacher sent to Talladega. He wrote, "Your letter stating that Mr. Steward of Marion will be with us soon is received . . . I assure you I am not pleased at the thought that he may be sent here next year. I wish we could secure another man for this reason. Mr. Steward has a state wide reputation as a politician. That [is why] he was compelled to leave Marion. I have learned that if we would succeed in our work we must for the present, at least, let politics entirely alone."[110]

Though many Northern missionaries remained aloof from politics, all participated in church work. The stated aim of the Association was "to commission only teachers possessing the spirit

---

[106] A.M.A., *Annual Report,* XXIX, 45, quoting Talladega Our *Mountain Home,* n.d.
[107] *"American Missionary,* XIX (Sept., 1875), 196-197.
[108] *"Ibid., XVIII* (August, 1874), 73.
[109] A.M.A. School reports for individual Alabama schools on a yearly basis are in AMA MSS.
[110] "'Albert A. Safford to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, Alabama, May 4, 1871; Thomas C. Steward to Erastus Cravath, Marion, Alabama, April 5, 1871.

of true religion." The missionaries believed they were called to work among the freedmen "not only by the claims of country but also by the voice of God . . . [to mold] not only citizens of the Republic but children of our Father in heaven.[111] Consequently, missionaries organized churches throughout Alabama. Reverend George W. Andrews assembled a congregation in Montgomery."[112] G. S. Pope paid $1000 for a building in Selma "consecrated to the service of God"[113] In November, 1873, the Sunday School numbered over one hundred, and Pope exclaimed, "I have never labored in any place where there was so much interest manifested by the citizens in our church work.'[114] In Marion, T. C. Steward directed Freedmen who cut timber and pounded nails for a new chapel. In August 1870, Negro masons completed the plastering, and church services commenced.[115] In all, Northern missionaries founded eight Congregational churches and as many Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal churches in Alabama in the decade after the Civil War.[116]

A.M.A. teachers also organized temperance societies. Sarah A. Jenness counted the membership of the "Lincoln Temperance Society of Eufaula" at one hundred in September, 1867. She then asked the New York office of the A.M.A. for eighty more certificates of membership.[117] Elliot Whipple bragged of one hundred and twelve Freedmen who had signed temperance pledges, "quite a number of whom were in the habit of drinking, many more of whom are seriously thinking about giving up their drams.[118] H. Brown called one Sabbath "a day of rejoicing" because a bar-tender, "who only a few weeks since had drank [sic] in a few days, thirty dollars worth of whisky," joined the Temperance Society of Talladega.

The interest of A.M.A. teachers in building churches and enlisting temperance pledges was indicative of their deep religious convictions. Almost all were devout Christians."[119] Miss Eliza Ayer ended a year of missionary work with the following words : "I have enjoyed the work this year, but cannot bear the thoughts of leaving this inviting field without seeing an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. During the last few days the desire has been increasing until it seems as though the blessing must come. . . . And will you not ask others to pray that our dear pupils and friends may become active useful Christians?"[120] Elliot Wheeler agreed with the principal aims of the A.M.A. He visualized his job as "work . .. to try to build conscience, to teach [freedmen] their personal responsibility to God." He devoted half an hour every morning "in religious experience" to "cultivate a spirit of devotion."[121] Miss Mary Wells enthusiastically penned, "I have thought of nothing but building Christianity . . . I can think of nothing but the salvation of these precious souls."[122]

---

[111] *"'American Missionary,* X (October, 1866), 225.
[112] *Ibid., XIX* (March, 1875),
[113] *Ibid., XVII* (Nov., 1873),
[114] *Ibid.,* 277.
[115] *Ibid., XVI* (Feb., 1872),
[116] *Ibid., XIX* (March, 1875), 55.
[117] "'Sarah A. Jenness to Edward Smith, Eufaula, Alabama, Sept. 20, 1867, AMA MSS.
[118] "Elliot Whipple to Edward Smith, LaFayette, Alabama, June 17, 1867; July 18, 1867; AMA MSS.
[119] John Silsby to George Whipple, Secretary, A.M.A., Montgomery, Sept. 14, 1866, AMA MSS.
[120] "Eliza Ager to Mr. Pike, Montgomery, June 23, 1867, AMA MSS.
[121] "Elliot Wheeler to Edward Smith, Selma, Alabama, June 4, 1868, AMA MSS.
[122] *'American Missionary, XVII* (March, 1873), 56.

Yet to characterize missionary workers in Alabama as "mere religious fanatics," religious lunatics, people zealous beyond the point of reason, is an oversimplification. The strong religious motives of missionary teachers in Alabama can be seen in their correspondence, but also in their letters is an equally strong interest in practical and mundane problems. Justus N. Brown, a man of vision and insight, taught at Talladega for two years. His correspondence details his efforts to build schools, place fences, dig wells, cut timber, barter with furniture companies, and teach a class of fifty freedmen. Brown disclosed his attitude toward missionary work when he wrote, "I can get the students to do the work and so help them."[123] Neither his actions nor the letters that he sent to the home office indicate he "thought of nothing but the salvation of souls." His attitude was less paternalistic than to "help the Freedman help himself." Henry E. Brown, no relation to his colleague, taught at Talladega for eight years. His correspondence describes building houses for Negroes, organizing the first "teacher" school in Alabama, and scouring the immediate area for possible normal school students. His attitude, like his co-worker, emphasized improvement through self uplift.[124] "I want them [the freedmen] to get just as much of books as they can," he advised Erastus M. Cravath, "and to get in addition an idea, a willingness, yea a desire to do anything they can by way of self support."[125]

The statements of both Browns indicate more practicality than piety. Yet, the two are not necessarily incompatible, and their religious motivation was probably strong. However, in the nineteenth century, the latter would be expected and does not constitute religious fanaticism. That missionaries were concerned with rectifying unfavorable conditions through self uplift in the Negro community—a definition for social reform much like that espoused by Jane Addams at Hull House in 1910 —is more important than their religious "fanaticism."

Along with establishing churches and temperance societies, A.M.A. representatives became active in economic schemes to aid the Freedmen. In Talladega, H. Brown petitioned R. Rasney, Superintendent of the Selma, Rome and Dalton Railroad, to aid normal school students. Mr. Rasney not only employed Negro teachers as part time clerks to provide them with an income, but cooperated in building a church and a school house, and provided passes for "colored teachers" and "travelling missionaries." Mr. Brown later reminisced, "I wish I had more railroad and business-men here interested in aiding the Freedmen."[126] Further, Brown erected a number of dwelling in the Negro community. Each summer he obtained lumber from Chattanooga and with laborers from the congregation constructed "one room frame structures." Upon completion he sold them at a low cost to freedmen. One missionary began a clothing store for Negroes in Talladega. Justus Brown wrote to Rev. Cravath of the need for "some means of furnishing steady and lucrative employment to young [black] men."[127] He argued that a clothing store would require a small amount of capital—the cost of a sewing machine and cloth—and there would be a ready market. "Farmers come here to sell provisions for 20 miles around," Brown explained, "they need clothing as colored people don't sew much, I believe." By April, 1871, the store contained a number of sewing machines and had Negro employees.'[128] In Montgomery, Thomas

---

[123] "'Justus N. Brown to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, Alabama, Sept. 29, 1870, AMA MSS.
[124] A.M.A., *Annual Report, XXVII*, 27-29.
[125] Henry E. Brown to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, Alabama, Jan. 20, 1874, AMA MSS.
[126] "Henry Brown to Edward Smith, Talladega, Nov. 1, 1871, AMA MSS.
[127] "Justus N. Brown to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, Ala., Oct. 10, 1870, AMA MSS.
[128] *Ibid.;* Albert A. Safford to Erastus Cravath, Talladega, April 8, 1871; Nov. 16, 1871.

C. Steward speculated in state bonds to provide funds for the A.M.A. in Alabama. He telegraphed E. M. Cravath on May 24, 1872, "Shall I sell the state bonds(-) . . . telegraph immedy [sic]."[129] Later, referring to the same investment, he wrote, "there is no possible chance to dispose of state money for more than 800 and it is the opinion of the best men here that it will not be better until the State Legislature convenes in November. . . . If you can carry them it will be best to wait."[130] He also purchased three and one half acres in Marion in order "to sell off the land" when the price was right.[131] Whatever the results of these two transactions, their purpose is clear — to aid the freedmen through finance and real estate speculation.

Northern missionaries, along with initiating economic enterprises, also took an active part in Negro journalism. John Silsby, formerly of the Siam Mission, became the first editor of the Nationalist, for a time the only Negro newspaper in the state of Alabama. He accepted the editorship in December, 1865, after a group of "colored people" in Mobile had purchased a press and outfitted a printing office."[132] In a letter, worth quoting in extent, Silsby describes the situation in Alabama and his relationship with the newspaper.

"An effort has been inaugurated at Mobile to establish a newspaper there elevated to the interests of loyalty and freedom. You are no doubt aware that all the newspapers in this state are bitterly opposed to the cause of the freedman and give all their energy to discourage him and his friends, and close the columns against everything in defense of that cause. The colored people believe they must have a paper. . . . They have consequently formed in Mobile a 'newspaper society,' have purchased a press, and the other means of outfit for a printing office, and at their solicitation I have consented to undertake the editorship of their paper."[133]

The first running of the press printed the "terms" of the Nationalist. The paper advocated "radicalism" that required equal and exact justice to all men irrespective of color, free elections, and a "faith in the capacity of the colored race."[134] Silsby undertook the editorship and immediately called upon the A.M.A. for assistance.'[135] Though he was able to remain with the paper for only a few months and large scale aid was not forthcoming, by 1866 the paper had a circulation of 1200, a full time agent in the field, and advertised for Montgomery as well as Mobile and the surrounding area.[136]

---

[129] Telegram, Thomas C. Steward to Cravath, May 24, 1872, AMA MSS.
[130] "Thomas C. Steward to Erastus Cravath, Montgomery, Alabama, May 25, 1872, AMA MSS.
[131] Ibid., Dec. 4, 1871.
[132] 'John Silsby to George Whipple, Mobile, Ala., Dec. 2, 1865, AMA MSS. The founding of the *Nationalist* was only one example of Negro self help in Alabama. At Mount Moriah, six miles from Montgomery, a colored man by the name of Edward Moore constructed a log schoolhouse at his own expense, on his own property, and taught over fifty pupils in a school entirely supported by freedmen. B. S. Turner, a successful businessman in Selma, contributed generously to schools for his own race. Freedmen built and maintained schools in Eufaula, Montgomery, Talladega, Franklin, Huntsville, Mobile and many other locations. The *Nation* estimated most of the six hundred Negro students in Mobile were self-supporting. The scholars bought their own books, clothes, and paid the salaries of two teachers out of eight. At the same time Wager Swayne mentioned "colored teachers [had] charge as principals of schools at Troy, Wetumpka, Home Colony, and Tuscaloosa."
Alvord, *Report,* Jan. 1, 1868, 32; Charles Wheeler to Edward Smith, Eufaula, Dec. 1, 1868, AMA MSS; John Silsby to George Whipple, Montgomery, Sept. 14, 1866, AMA MSS; The *American Missionary,* XIV (Aug. 1870), 174; The *Nation,* II (Feb. 1866), 209; Senate Executive Documents, 39 Cong., 2 sess., Dec. 6, 12n. Report of Assistant Commissioner of BRFAL, Wager Swayne to War Dept., Jan., 31, 1866.
[133] John Silsby to George Whipple, Montgomery, Ala., Nov. 2, 1865, AMA MSS.
[134] *"Nationalist,* Oct. 16, 1865, AMA MSS.
[135] John Silsby to George Whipple, Montgomery, Nov. 2, 1865, AMA MSS.
[136] *136Ibid.,* Dec. 2, 1865.

The letters of missionaries in Alabama during Reconstruction, hitherto unavailable to historians, indicate that the results of missionary societies' efforts to educate Negroes were not "wholly bad." On the contrary, A.M.A. teachers started schools for Negroes in a region where no institutions of learning for freedmen had previously existed. Thousands of blacks learned to read and write and many advanced to "higher branches" only with the assistance of Northern philanthropy. Missionaries instituted normal courses and sent teachers to remote districts, who in turn established schools. The evidence also shows that Northern missionaries were concerned with improving conditions that caused ignorance and poverty. Besides distributing supplies of clothing and food to the destitute, they editored black newspapers, started Negro businesses and initiated building programs for improving housing, schools and churches. Most significantly, many in their ranks, Justus and Henry Brown in particular, generated an enthusiasm for self help and uplift among recently emancipated slaves that transcended the decade of Reconstruction. By 1875, poverty still existed in Alabama and only one in eight Negroes between the ages of six and sixteen attended school, but far from being a "permanent influence for evil" Northern philanthropy laid the foundations for Negro education and self-improvement upon which later generations would have to build.